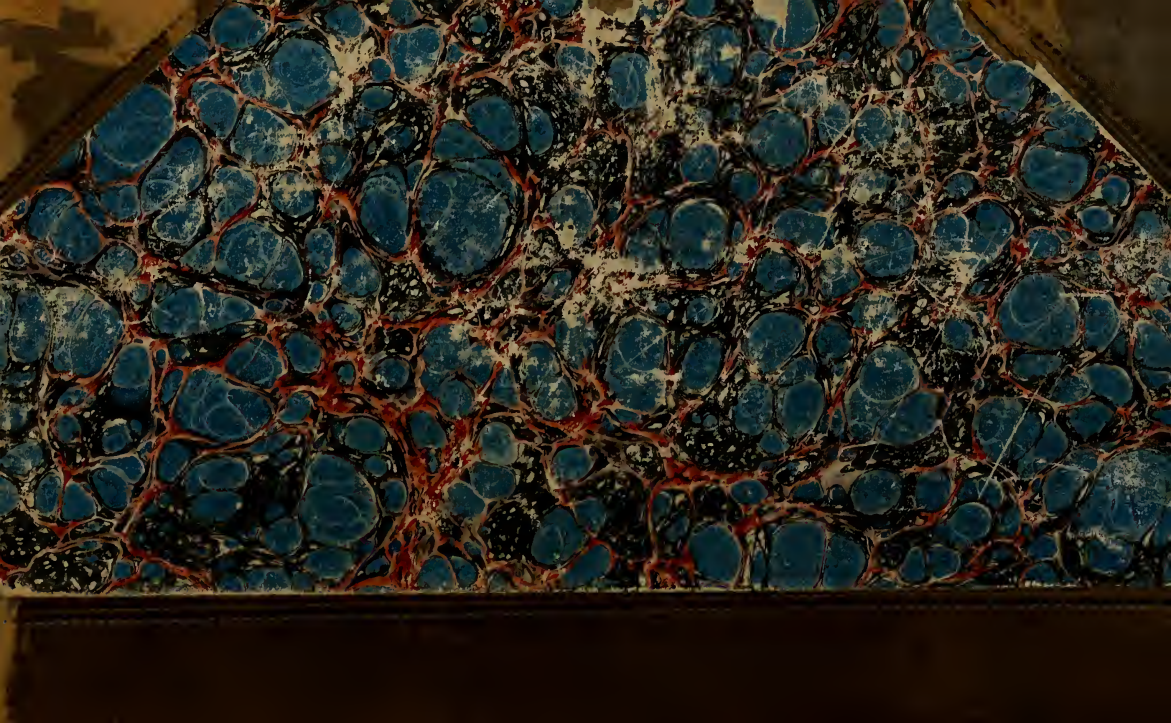

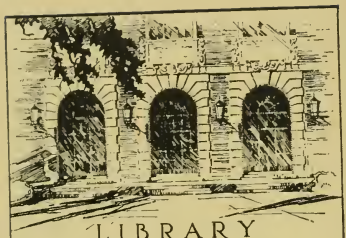

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A FEW WORDS

IN BEHALF OF

THE ORPHAN GIRLS

IN

Union Houses.

LONDON:

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—

MDCCCLIX.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

In the Press,

A PLEA FOR THE HELPLESS;

OR, TIMELY PREVENTION.

LONDON:
WILLIAM STEVENS, PRINTER, 37, BELL YARD,
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THE

ORPHAN GIRLS IN UNION HOUSES.

In a return made to the House of Commons in 1856, it is shown that our Workhouses contain 12,083 Orphans.

May we not presume that half of these are girls? Has any one ever asked what becomes of them? Amidst all the efforts made and interest excited on the subject of Reformatories and Refuges for the fallen and penitent, may it not be wise to consider a little how far prevention may be better than cure, and to search closely into some of the *causes* of sin and misery among us? So long as these girls are in the Workhouse they receive an excellent education, better than in most of the village Schools in England; and have this advantage, that they are never taken away from the daily instruction. But in a great degree this learning is mechanical, and of the head, not of the heart; so that when they are sent out into places of hard work, at the early age of eleven or twelve, where their learning is not kept up by exercise, or the knowledge they have acquired properly directed, it is either wholly lost, or turned to a bad account. It is like the seed cast on stony ground which withers away from lack of moisture, and it comes under the head of knowledge without religious principle to direct it.

In nearly all cases these girls are sent to places of all-work; they are taken by those who are glad to get a Workhouse girl, because they need not give any wages or a mere nominal sum, and because they have no fear of any interference from parents or friends. Ignorant of household

work, never having known what the interior of a house of any better class is, their ideas being limited to the routine of a Workhouse life, these poor girls are quite unfit for higher places; and those ladies only who wish to do an act of Christian charity will venture on the experiment of *taking a Workhouse girl.* Once out of the Union School, it may truly be said these girls are literally sent into all the dangers of the world, utterly unprotected and *homeless.* By the regulations of the Workhouse, they cannot be received back again, in the event of their leaving their places, except as adult females, and, consequently, they are put among women of the worst character—many perhaps of the lowest and most degraded of their sex. There is *no place* in the Union for respectable young women. They go into the world at that early age when girls most need a mother's care and protection, both for health and moral guidance. In many cases they have no friends or relations to apply to in cases of hard usage or in the pressure of temptation; and when they have relations, they are generally too poor to keep them, and too ignorant to guide them. Alas! many children have been from infancy in the Union Houses, and have never known any other home; and those, who have closely watched the effects of such a life on Union children, will have noticed a peculiar lethargy, a slowness of movement, a dragging walk, and general dullness of mind and action, the inevitable results of a monotonous life, in which there is no outlet for the natural feelings, and no spirit of activity giving the freedom of limb, which, with all her poverty, the cottage child possesses.

Is it then to be wondered at, that after a few years they return to the Workhouse, either with ruined health to go into the Infirmary and die, or to add another to the number of the fallen ones—lost from the want of some friendly hand to save them. Must not the sad thought often have come into their minds—

"No man careth for my soul."

Is then the shelter of the Union House to be rejected and

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given up as wholly bad—as only a preparation for vice and misery in after life?

No. It is a valuable and noble institution, one of the many things of which England may justly boast; but it needs much to make it what it *might* be, and *ought* to be, as a Christian institution in a Christian land. It needs the aid and attention of all those who live within its neighbourhood; and of *all* who care for the eternal welfare of our poor and destitute children.

It *might* become a training-place for useful and valuable servants in any class of society. Two or three ladies who have tried the experiment of taking girls out of a Workhouse, and training them for service, can bear testimony that this is possible.

But it will be asked—How can this be done? By establishing Industrial Training Schools for these girls, from the age of thirteen to sixteen, under the superintendence and religious teaching of ladies who will give regular attendance, and who, after preparing them for the duties of a servant, will take care that they are placed in respectable situations, and provide a home for them in case they are out of place without any fault of their own. Where this cannot be done, much may be accomplished by taking a personal interest in the Schools of the Union, and by helping to get proper places for the girls; so that those who engage them may know that they have friends who will watch over them; thus giving the girls themselves an inducement for behaving well, and obviating the feeling that they are degraded by having come out of a Workhouse.

Girls of this class are to be preferred as servants from the fact that their better feelings have had no vent in family intercourse; never having known what a *home* is, they become attached to their first mistresses, and regard as their *home* the place in which they first became a member of a happy domestic family. This is a fact, which experience has proved to be true. But even supposing this should not be the case, and that disappointment should follow, and some fail in becoming all that is hoped, ought the endeavour to save a portion of those who are so peculiarly the Lambs

of Christ's flock—inasmuch as they are Orphans and *Poor*—to be the less earnestly made ?

Let all who love that Saviour who came to seek and save those that were destitute, poor, and afflicted, do all that is in their power to work for *Him*, and trust that He will bless their work and labour of love.

And let us remember, to use the words of an active philanthropist in the present day—That the luxury of doing good is not to be enjoyed without some cost.

Since the foregoing pages were first written, an Industrial School for the Orphan Girls in Workhouses has been established in Surrey, at Brockham, near Reigate. They are under the care of a matron, who is well qualified to train them in all the duties of domestic service. Twelve girls are now in it, and a building is commenced which will enable six more to be admitted; the great object kept in view is to fit them for becoming independent useful members of society able to earn their own honest livelihood,—and entirely to break all connection with the Workhouse, so as to prevent any possibility of their ever returning there to become a burthen on the rates.

In every way the system followed is that of a *Home*, more than a School, so as to give it the character of a family, and to awaken and bring into play those better feelings which have been hitherto dormant. There has been much striking evidence within the last few years to prove the startling fact, that the children brought up in the Workhouse Schools form the largest proportion of those who afterwards fill our Reformatories, Refuges, and Prisons. The Rev. J. S. Brewer, for many years Chaplain to St. Giles' Workhouse, has given strong testimony to the truth of this, besides many others. The Master of one of our largest Reformatories states that, in his experience, the most unmanageable boys he has to deal with, are those who have come out of the Workhouses. The cause of this has been ably pointed out by Mr. Thomson, of Banchory, in his work on Prevention and Punishment. "The training of the Workhouse School, even where best managed, necessarily unfits for the battle of life, and though there may be abundance

of excellent *teaching*, there is and can be no education for the active business of the world." In a Workhouse School, the system is mechanical. There is no exercise of thought in the children, and they are invariably sent out as servants of all work, to act for themselves, at the early age of twelve or thirteen, sometimes at eleven, before they have any idea of the way in which work is to be done. The plan laid down in this new School, is to keep the girls till they are sixteen, and then to send them into situations where they will be under an older servant to direct and teach them; it will also be a home for them to return to, except where they are thrown out of place by actual vice or misconduct, such as would fit them only for a Reformatory.

It may be said—of what use is one school on so small a scale in a case where the evil to be remedied is spread over so wide a space, and is so great. The answer is this—All things must have a beginning, and it is hoped that if, after being fairly tried, this plan is found to answer, it may no longer be small and local, but may be followed up by similar establishments and *homes* for the Workhouse Orphans all over England. If the guardians of every Union would only contribute towards them the same amount which the children cost in the workhouse, private subscriptions would contribute the remainder, and the country will be saved the burthen of supporting them, hereafter, as inmates of its Prisons, Reformatories, and Penitentiaries.

The motto over the entrance to this Home is, Think and Thank; these words express what the promoters desire. If these children can be taught to *Think* that they are Immortal Beings, no longer outcasts from society, but children of their Heavenly Father, who has a work for them to do on earth as faithful servants to Him, then they will *Thank* that merciful God who has so loved and cared for them, and prove that thankfulness to God is the most sure means of making them faithful servants to their earthly masters.

Think and Thank.

THE BROCKHAM HOME & TRAINING SCHOOL.

A School for Girls taken from Workhouses, chiefly Orphans, from the age of twelve to sixteen, is opened at Brockham, near Reigate in Surrey.

They are under the care of a Matron, and are taught all kinds of industrial work, with the object of fitting them for domestic service; suitable places will be found for them as soon as they are ready.

A Home will also be provided for the Girls in case of sickness, or of their being out of place, should the reasons for their leaving be satisfactory.

Ten pounds a-year will be required for each child, except in special cases, or when she is paid for by the Parish, in which case a Girl will be admitted for whatever sum is agreed upon by the Managers and Guardians.

Annual Subscriptions, however small in amount, and Donations, will be thankfully received.

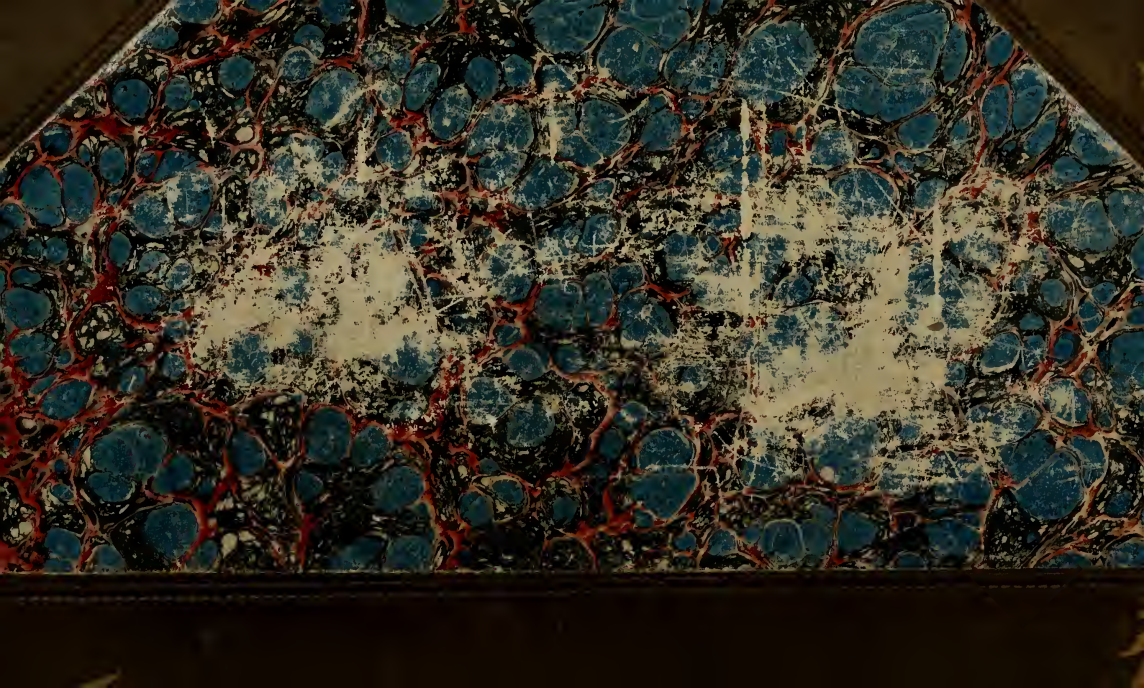
Those who are desirous of furthering this object are requested to communicate with any of the following:—

Rev. Alan Cheales, Brockham.

Rev. Henry Gosse, Chaplain of the Reigate Union, Red Hill, Surrey.

Honorable Mrs. Way, Wonham Manor, Reigate.

Mrs. Beaumont, Buckland Court, Reigate.

Mrs. Forman, Betchworth, Reigate.

Donations and Subscriptions may be paid into Hoare's Bank, Fleet Street, or by Post Office Order to Emmeline Way.